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## THE THEORY OF POLYSTYLISM AS A TOOL FOR ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC IN THE POST-SOVIET CULTURAL SPACE: SOME TERMINOLOGICAL ASPECTS

The aim of this article is to discuss some essential concepts related to polystylism – a term first defined by Alfred Schnittke in 1971 and widely used within the post-Soviet cultural space. In the research conducted by various English-speaking musicologists, the term *polystylism* appears rarely and mostly in relation to Schnittke's own music, whereas the related concepts of collage and borrowing are covered much more comprehensively. However, collage can be viewed as only a part of polystylism, because it includes only sharp stylistic juxtapositions and does not reflect other forms of stylistic interaction that could be described as diffuse, or symbiotic, polystylism. The theory of borrowing, for its part, covers a chronologically wide range of music (cantus firmus technique, quodlibet, paraphrase, etc.) but does not reflect the specifics of the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>-century music. The ability to cover these specifics is an advantage of polystylism and related terms, and therefore their broader integration into the international musicological lexicon should be encouraged.

### 1. Introduction

Despite the globalisation of the contemporary world, musicology in the post-Soviet cultural space retains its distinction from Western (including English-speaking) musicology in several aspects, among them in the field of terminology. These differences are not very significant regarding the music of the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, because the traditions of its analysis had already developed in Russia before the Soviet era under the influence of the German *Musikwissenschaft*, and were mostly preserved even during Soviet times. However, due to

the Iron Curtain, the development of contemporary music terminology lagged significantly behind until the era of Perestroika. Soviet composers and musicologists nevertheless showed significant interest in new composition techniques, and in several cases they introduced their own terms, independent of those used in Western musicology. Thus, various terminological concepts were created that are still of great importance today in post-Soviet musicology. The aim of this article is to discuss one such concept: the terminology of polystylism. The article begins by looking into its origins and use in modern times, and then provides an analytical comparison to English-speaking musicological terminology used to describe similar music phenomena.

## 2. Schnittke's concept and its critics

It is well known that the term *polystylism* in relation to music was first defined by Soviet composer Alfred Schnittke in 1971.<sup>1</sup> When developing the term, he foresaw potential criticism and therefore raised a rhetorical question, which he answered himself: “But should one use the term *polystylistic* (...)? The polystylistic tendency has always existed in concealed form in music, and continues to do so, because music that is stylistically sterile would be dead. So is it worth even discussing the subject? I believe it is essential to do so, because in recent times the polystylistic method has become a conscious device. Even without making direct quotations, a composer often plans a polystylistic effect in advance” (Schnittke [1971] 2002: 89).<sup>2</sup>

Schnittke defined the two main principles of polystylism as quotation and allusion. The understanding of quotation is quite broad, including not only exact quotations but also the technique of adaptation (“the retelling of an alien musical text in one’s own musical language [analogous to modern literary adaptations of

<sup>1</sup> In the original (Russian) version, the term is *полистилистика*, and in the English version of the essay by Schnittke (‘Polystylistic Tendencies in Modern Music’: Schnittke [1971] 2002) it is translated as *polystylistic*. However, the term *polystylism* used in this article (except quotations from the above-mentioned essay) is more common in the English language.

<sup>2</sup> The quotation is given in the English translation (Schnittke [1971] 2002), and here a small difference from the original should be mentioned. In the fourth sentence Schnittke uses the phrase ‘in the last decade’ (for the Russian version, see: Шнитке [1971] 1990: 327) and not ‘in recent times’. This is important from the viewpoint of the chronological borders of polystylism, a topic that will be discussed later in this article.

ancient subjects] or a free development of alien material in one's own style") as well as "the quotation not of musical fragments but of the technique of an alien style" (Schnittke [1971] 2002: 87–88). Allusion is described as "the use of subtle hints and unfulfilled promises that hover on the brink of quotation but do not actually cross it" (Schnittke [1971] 2002: 88).

In the post-Soviet musicological space, this theory has both supporters and critics. In his fundamental study *Стиль и жанр в музыке* ('Style and Genre in Music'), Yevgeny Nazaikinsky accepts the term *polystylism* itself, although without great enthusiasm: "Actually, this technique is not so new, and conscious, purposeful stylistic juxtapositions and relations, of course, are found in the compositional practice already long before the avantgarde of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Maybe it is only, in a certain way, more intensive and radical use of the stylistic components of the composition which allows to add the 'polystylism' to other terms and characteristics for the age, such as 'polytonality', (...) and 'polyrhythm'" (Назайкинский 2003: 144). However, Nazaikinsky considers the devices of polystylism described by Schnittke as too abstract and incapable of reflecting the specifics of the technique: "The word 'allusion' is used by the author of the essay exactly in the same sense as in the philological learning of stylistic devices – as a textual hint to a familiar musical sequence. (...) Furthermore, other terms used by the composer could also be attributed both to contemporary music and past music. The only exception is the key term of his theory – polystylism" (Назайкинский 2003: 144).

In her monograph *Musical Style and Genre: History and Modernity*, published both in Russian (1990, second edition 2015) and English (2000), Marina Lobanova frequently uses the term *polystylism* to describe the processes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, she also states: "No single terminological system was produced in the polystylistic situation, which is quite understandable. Polystylistic treatments were so dissimilar and their sources so contradictory that it was not possible to envisage a single method" (Lobanova 2000: 154).

Schnittke himself does not try to create a close link between his polystylism and the collage research that became more and more popular in Western musicology in the age of postmodernism. The absence of such a link is also highlighted by Lobanova: "A. Schnittke distinguishes between the 'quotation principle' and the 'allusion principle'. He does not discuss the concept of 'collage'" (Lobanova

2000: 154). This does not mean that Schnittke avoids this term – for example, he characterises *Hymns* by Karlheinz Stockhausen as “a ‘super-collage’ mosaic of the modern world” (Schnittke [1971] 2002: 87). However, a further clarification of the term *collage* is not offered.

### 3. Development of Schnittke’s terminology by other authors

In general, the theory of polystylism, as formulated by Schnittke himself, has not been explored in detail. Nevertheless, Soviet musicologists who were contemporaries of the composer, manifested a strong interest in this new term and gradually developed and enriched the concept (Карминский 1975, Савенко 1985, etc.). Already in the post-Soviet era, this work resulted in publications presenting the theory of polystylism as a complete and comprehensive system, a significant tool for the analysis of contemporary music. To justify this thesis, the most important aspects and their innovation in two musicological writings on polystylism should be highlighted. Their authors are Andrej Kudrjashov (Кудряшов 2006)<sup>3</sup> and Evgenija Chigareva (Чигарева 2007),<sup>4</sup> and in general, both writings present similar views that differ only in details.

Firstly, it is important to note that Schnittke’s theory is enriched with a typologisation:

- collage-like polystylism (Чигарева 2007: 437, Кудряшов 2006: 381),
- symbiotic (Чигарева 2007: 438), or diffuse (Кудряшов 2006: 381), polystylism.

The term *collage* is well known, and therefore the term *diffuse (symbiotic) polystylism* should be highlighted as an innovation of this concept. It describes the interaction of different styles without a collage, the latter being only one of many expressions of such interaction. The term *diffuse polystylism* was offered

<sup>3</sup> Andrej Kudrjashov (1964 – 2005) was a musicologist, a former student of Valentina Holopova, and the author of the monograph *Теория музыкального содержания* (‘Theory of Musical Content’, 2006), which includes a chapter on polystylism. The monograph is based on the course Kudrjashov taught at the Moscow Conservatory.

<sup>4</sup> Evgenija Chigareva and Valentina Holopova are authors of the first monograph on Schnittke, published in 1990. In it, they explain the concept of polystylism mainly based on the terminology used by Schnittke himself (Холопова, Чигарева 1990: 39–41). Chigareva significantly developed this concept further in a chapter of the collective monograph *Теория современной композиции* (‘Theory of Contemporary Composition’, Чигарева 2007).

by Vladimir Karminskij in his unpublished diploma work defended at Moscow Conservatory (Карминский 1975). Kudrjashov, developing his idea, explains it as follows: “Diffuse polystylism is a flowing transition from one style to another, or rather, their textural and harmonic ‘contexture’ that was already found by Stravinsky (for example, (...) in his Piano Sonata or the second movement of the Symphony of Psalms). Many examples of stylistic diffusion could also be found in the music of Shostakovich, Schnittke, Denisov and Slonimsky” (Кудряшов 2006: 381).

Symbiotic polystylism is a synonymous term. In this context, the concept of symbiosis itself is borrowed by Soviet musicologist Svetlana Savenko from Karlheinz Stockhausen, who used it in 1970 when writing about his concept of *Weltmusik* (Савенко 1985: 9), and Chigareva has developed her concept (Чигарева 2007: 447). The definition of this phenomenon in the collective monograph *Теория современной композиции* is as follows: “Symbiotic polystylism (compared with collage-like) is more complex. There are no stylistic contrasts or, if there are, the ‘seams’ are ‘smoothed’ with flowing transitions from one sphere to another – a ‘stylistic modulation’” (Чигарева 2007: 438).

Kudrjashov offers another typology alongside symbiotic and collage-like polystylism: selective and pluralistic polystylism. He explains the difference as follows: “With selective polystylism, (...) the author is focused on one or a few related stylistic models, which are united by a remote historical age (for example, principles of the baroque instrumental concerto in A. Pärt’s works from the 1960s). Meanwhile, pluralistic polystylism has several styles, all different in terms of history, individuality and nationality, and they exist together in a composition based on parity. Furthermore, none of them are alien to the composer – a stylistic ‘polyglot’ (“La chevauchée fantastique” from the opera *Miroir de Votre Faust* by Henri Pousseur, 1967)” (Кудряшов 2006: 382).

One aspect of polystylism remains somewhat unclear, namely, its chronological boundaries. It must be noted that even Schnittke did not define them unambiguously. On the one hand, when writing in 1971 about his motivation to use the term *polystylism*, he refers to the previous decade (the 1960s). On the other hand, the examples he mentions also include earlier 20<sup>th</sup>-century music, such as Shostakovich’s Piano Trio No. 2 (“the neoclassical passacaglia theme”), Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella*, Alban Berg’s Violin Concerto and others (Schnittke [1971] 2002:

87). Kudrjashov differentiates between neoclassicism and polystylism as two different music directions (Кудряшов 2006: 376–377); however, when describing manifestations of polystylism, he mentions compositions not only from the 1960s but also Anton Webern's *Ricercar* based on the theme from Bach's *The Musical Offering* as well as fragments from Shostakovich's Piano Trio No. 2 and Symphony No. 8, among others (Кудряшов 2006: 378). Chigareva tries to find a compromise in the contradiction, offering to separate polystylism into narrow and broad interpretations: the narrow interpretation provides "a uniting of different (various levels of contrast) stylistic layers, with two main types – collage-like and symbiotic" (Чигарева 2007: 439). In the broad interpretation, it is "any case of turning to an alien style, no matter whether it is the distance between the author's own material and the borrowed material, or they fuse together in a unified, enriched author-style. In this case, this also includes neoclassicism from the 1920s and 1930s (Stravinsky, Hindemith, Casella, Shostakovich)" (Чигарева 2007: 440).

My view is that there is no well-defined line between stylistic symbiosis and 'enriched author-style'; therefore, the broader definition, including the neoclassicism of the 1920s and 1930s, seems to be the most accurate.

#### **4. *Alternative form* by Valentina Holopova in the context of polystylism**

In the conception of contemporary form by musicologist Valentina Holopova, the term *alternative form* (ABABA...), developed independently of the theory of polystylism, is particularly interesting. A and B are so-called *macrothemes*. Holopova uses this term to describe types of expressiveness and, in many cases, also types of stylistics. An example could be the Sarabande from the *Collage sur B-A-C-H* by Arvo Pärt (Холопова 1994: 65), in which the Estonian composer mixes three different sections of Bach's Sarabande (from his English Suite No. 6, in Pärt's own instrumentation) with the distortion of this material given in a strongly expressed contemporary technique (using tone-clusters), but still in the rhythm of the Sarabande. This work is based primarily on selective, rather than pluralistic polystylism, and its semantic purpose could be characterised with a sentence from Kudrjashov: "The most important idea, musically manifested in

the language of polystylistic dialogue between contemporary ‘I’ and past ‘You’, becomes the view of Harmony and Disharmony as the basis of human existence” (Кудряшов 2006: 386).

The new term by Holopova, partially inspired by polystylism, can be perceived as an interesting tool for the analysis of contemporary music because it creates an arch between two different approaches to analysis: the structural and the semiotic.

## 5. Polystylism and related concepts in English-speaking musicology

The general attitude in English-speaking musicology towards the term *polystylism* is reflected by the authoritative encyclopaedia *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, which does not include an article dedicated to polystylism, although the term is used in several articles about composers, countries or genres. An analysis of the geographical representation confirms that the usage of the term is mostly related to the Soviet/post-Soviet (nine cases) or eastern European (former socialist countries; three cases) cultural space. However, this term can also be found in five other articles, including one about the 20<sup>th</sup>-century American composer Henry Cowell (<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/search?q=polystylism&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true>). In all cases, the term has been used without any further elaboration.

Outside of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the term *polystylism* most often appears in relation to Schnittke (for example, Dixon 2017, Medić 2010, Peterson 2000, Tremblay 2007). Even if the technique is explored in detail, it is usually only done using Schnittke’s own concept. Therefore, the situation is cardinally different from the one observed in post-Soviet musicology, which views polystylism as a general characteristic of contemporary music.<sup>5</sup> This raises the question: Which terms do English-speaking musicologists use to describe the phenomenon that their post-Soviet colleagues associate with polystylism?

<sup>5</sup> One of the most recent examples is the dissertation *Полистилистика как феномен европейской художественной культуры* (‘Polystylism as a Phenomenon of European Artistic Culture’, by Natalja Il'ichjova: Ильичёва 2015), whose theoretical base also includes the cited research by Chigareva (2007).

Of course, there has been much research on different kinds of stylistic interactions in the music of the 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, from Charles Ives (Metzer 2003: 15–46, etc.) to Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Luciano Berio and George Rochberg (Losada 2004, etc.). The theoretical principles highlighted in these works could be a separate topic for research. This article, however, will only try to show the extent to which English-speaking musicology's dominant approach is compatible, or incompatible, with the concept of polystylism. For this reason, it is compared with the terminology of borrowing.

J. Peter Burkholder has developed this topic the most, dedicating to it several papers (Burkholder 1985, 1994), a book (Burkholder 1995) and an article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Burkholder 2001a). He has also attempted a systemisation of various borrowing techniques from the Middle Ages (cantus firmus technique, intabulations, etc.) through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a period that offered some innovations in the field of borrowing:

- collage (Ives, Berio);
- jazz improvisation;
- jazz contrafacts (tunes written on borrowed chord changes);
- avantgarde collage (Cage, Kagel);
- tape and electronic reworking (Burkholder 1994: 870).

As we see, classical music is represented in this list only by collage as well as tape and electronic reworking. Thus, it does not cover several manifestations of stylistic interaction in the 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> century music that are neither collage nor reworking. The term *polystylism*, on the contrary, highlights specifics of this time period; its characteristic is the ability of various musical parameters to represent radically different styles, even without the use of quotations. For example, an atonal melody may be rhythmised as a baroque dance, a romantic song-like texture may serve as a basis for tone-clusters, etc. It would be impossible to describe such phenomena characteristic for music of the 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> centuries by using terms from the theory of borrowing only.

Collage is a common concept in the theories of polystylism and borrowing, but its interpretation remains different to an extent. Chigareva defines collage as “stylistically contrasting (or even alien) fragments united in a single work”



(Чигарева 2007: 437). Burkholder, on the other hand, describes collage in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as “(...) the juxtaposition of multiple quotations, styles or textures so that each element maintains its individuality and the elements are perceived as excerpted from many sources and arranged together, rather than sharing common origins” ([http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/53083?q=collage&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/53083?q=collage&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit)). The key words that highlight the difference of Burkholder’s definition are *multiple* and *many*. This position differs from the viewpoint of Chigareva and other researchers of polystylism; in their opinion, a composition based on only two contrasting styles could also be described as collage. Of course, the form of such a piece will also develop differently than the one in which a mosaic of many styles is used. To separate these two types of collage, we can use two terms created after an analogy with the selective and pluralistic polystylism mentioned by Kudrjashov, namely, selective collage (for example, the alternative form of Pärt’s *Sarabande* from *Collage sur B-A-C-H*) and pluralistic collage (for example, the third movement of Berio’s *Sinfonia*).

## 6. Conclusions

International awareness of the theory of polystylism has been thwarted by different terminological traditions in English-speaking and post-Soviet musicology as well as by some imperfections in the theory itself. The main deficiencies are the uncertainty of chronological borders and the concept of symbiotic polystylism, which is interesting and valuable yet underdeveloped when compared to the adaptation of collage in English-speaking musicology.

There are advantages to the terminologies of both polystylism and borrowing. Their skilful connection, paying attention to the points of interaction, could see them both enriched and would positively influence analysis of the 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century music.

Just like the more commonly studied terms *collage*, *quotation* and *allusion*, the terms discussed in this work – namely, *polystylism* (symbiotic/diffuse and collage-like; selective and pluralistic) and *alternative form* – can be successfully used not only in musicological analysis but also generally in literature and art theory because they often operate on extra-musical meanings.

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## Teorija polistilizma kao alata za analizu suvremene glazbe u poslijesovjetskome kulturnom prostoru: neki terminološki aspekti

### Sažetak

Cilj je ovoga rada analizirati određene ključne pojmove povezane s polistilizmom – nazivom koji je prvi definirao Alfred Schnittke 1971. godine i koji je bio široko upotrebljavan u poslijesovjetskome kulturnom prostoru. U radovima različitih muzikologa s engleskoga govornog područja, naziv *polistilizam* rijetko se pojavljuje i uglavnom u odnosu sa Schnittkeovom vlastitom glazbom, dok su povezani pojmovi kolaža i posuđivanja znatno više obuhvaćeni. Međutim, kolaž se može smatrati samo dijelom polistilizma zato što uključuje samo oštre stilističke jukstapozicije, a ne odražava druge oblike stilističke interakcije koji bi se mogli opisati kao difuzni ili simbiotički polistilizam. Teorija posuđivanja, s druge strane, pokriva kronološki širok glazbeni raspon (tehniku *cantus firmus*, *quodlibet*, parafrazu i dr.), ali ne odražava specifičnosti glazbe 20. i 21. stoljeća. Prednost je polistilizma i srodnih naziva u njihovoj mogućnosti da uzmu u obzir te specifičnosti te bi se stoga trebala poticati njihova šira integracija u međunarodni muzikološki leksikon.

**Keywords:** collage-like polystylism, diffuse polystylism, borrowing

**Ključne riječi:** polistilizam nalik kolažu, difuzni polistilizam, posuđivanje

